

Nevada Test Site

Early Nevada Test Site History

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Introduction

Although Nevada has been occupied since early times, beginning with the Paleo-Indians, it was the last state entered by white explorers during historical times. Peter Skene Ogden, an Englishman, led a Hudson's Bay Company trapping expedition down the river known as the Humboldt. If he did, as many historians believe, enter present Elko County in 1826, he was the first white man to enter northern Nevada. During the same year, the famous trapper-explorer Jedediah Smith is known to have crossed the southern tip of the state on his way to California. The Old Spanish Trail, Nevada's oldest, was first traveled by trappers and missionaries as early as 1829. Trail blazing was active during the 1840's with the establishment of the Bidwell Trail across northern Nevada in 1841, explorations by John C. Fremont from 1843 through 1845, and the ill-fated Donner Party in 1846. Despite a considerable amount of travel across the state, it was not until 1849 that the first permanent settlement was established by a group of Mormons at Mormon Station, later to be called Reese's Station, and finally, in 1856, Genoa -- a name it still retains.

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First Evidence of White Explorers

The first evidence of white penetration into the Nevada Test Site is a stone block inscribed with the name *R.J. BYOR* and the date 1847. The block was used in the construction of the fireplace of the stone cabin at Cane Springs. The stone was later removed to the Mackay School of Mines Museum, University of Nevada, Reno. The origin of the stone, however, remains a mystery. Margaret Long, author of *The Shadow of the Arrow*, stated in her book that a number of legends are connected with the stone, one being that it was

carved by a member of the Mormon Battalion who might have wandered into the area in 1847. The Mormon Battalion of 500 men was formed during the Mexican War in 1846 to serve as a home guard for settlers in California. The unit left Brigham Young's winter quarters at *Council Bluffs, Iowa* marched to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas and then by way of Santa Fe and Albuquerque, New Mexico to Los Angeles, California where they arrived in January 1847. Their enlistment ended in 1847, and most of the members went to San Francisco to join Sam Brannan's Mormon Colony which had sailed from New York. Part of the

Battalion traveled overland to meet Brigham Young's group which was moving westward toward their arrival at Salt Lake Valley on July 24, 1847. This group could have well passed through the present Nevada Test Site on their way east.

Early Emigrants

The first recorded entry of white travelers into the present Nevada Test Site was that of a group of emigrants to California in 1849. This group had broken off from a party led by *Captain Jefferson Hunt* in the neighborhood of Enterprise, Utah, after hearing rumors of a shorter route to California than that offered by the Old Spanish Trail. While *Hunt* headed southward over known territory, the splinter party plunged off into the unknown. A second splint was made at Papoose Lake, a dry lake north of Indian Springs, where a group of wagons, known as the *Bennett-Arcane Party*, decided on a southerly route. The remaining wagons, the *Jayhawkers*, followed a westward course to Tippipah Spring. There another split occurred. The *Jayhawkers* separated from the slower moving family of *James Brier*, with the *Jayhawkers* going south between Skull Mountain and Forty Mile Canyon. They crossed Tonopah Wash and entered Amargosa Valley east of the wash. The *Briers* entered Forty Mile Canyon, west of Tippipah Spring, and after many difficulties were forced to abandon their wagons. Continuing on foot, the *Briers* picked up the trail of the *Jayhawker* party and were reunited with them at Furnace Creek. The *Bennett-Arcane* party, led by William Lewis Manly, proceeded southwest from Papoose Lake to Cane Springs, at the

base of Skull Mountain, and on into Death Valley. Nearly all of the Forty-Niners reached California.

Later movements into the Nevada Test Site involved prospectors, ranchers, wild-horse hunters, and the establishment of a relay station for a freight line at Cane Springs. Improvements were made to produce better flows of water at the more important springs. Operating mines were the Horn Silver at the short-lived town of Wahmonie, that existed for about three months in 1928, about four miles west of Cane Springs, the Climax tungsten mine at the north end of Yucca Flat, a cinnabar mine and retort on Mine Mountain, and rich galena deposits of the Groom Mine.

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